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ABSTRACT

There are many similarities between Robert Browning's "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" that are seldom noted by literary critics. Both works were begun for the amusement of specific children, both employ a strange subterranean journey as a central device, and both are works of nonsense insofar as nonsense is the art of rearranging immutable laws in such a way as to set logic, order, authority, or accepted standards of behavior slightly awry. This last feature is most significant. Both works attempt an imaginative revelation of child-adult relations, and both are critical of adults in general and of those in authority in particular. Both violate the reigning didactic premise that had been in existence since Horace. The curse of the didactic tradition in children's literature is the insistence that literature has to teach and that literary and aesthetic values are neglected in favor of teaching useful lessons. However, in both "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and "Alice in Wonderland" the moralizing narrator is not a good guide and the reader is encouraged to look beyond the formal comments of the narrator to the story itself. (MKM)

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# Lifting the Curse of the Roman: Quintus Horatius Flaccus Meets the Pied Piper of Hamelin

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Lifting the Curse of the Roman: Quintus
Horatius Flaccus Meets the Pied Piper of Hamelin

--Then said Christian to the Interpreter, Expound this matter more fully to me.

--The Pilgrim's Progress

Of all the temptations which beset the ctitic and historian of children's literature, perhaps the most insidious is the temptation to disgust. Certainly, in reading much of the literature written for children in the past, one needs to struggle against disgust (or at least impatience), with the pervasive odour of auctorial smugness. Few presences are as intolerable as the presence of those engaged in Good Works--especially those engaged in writing them at children. Until very recently indeed, most writers of children's books assumed that good works for children taught them useful lessons of one sort or another,[1] and that didacticism is--at least in works written for children--the queen of the literary virtues. In the hands of truly determined benevolence, even fairy tales could be pressed to serve a didactic purpose. Consider the correspondent who wrote to Mrs. Trimmer's The Guardian of Education on the subject of "Cinderella," denouncing it as "perhaps one of the most exceptionable books that was ever written for children. . . . It paints some of the worst passions that can enter into the human breast," among which she lists vanity and a love of dress, as well as envy, jealousy, a dislike to mothers-in-law. . . ."[2] Her indignation was, we may hope, in part alleviated by the version of "Cinderella" which George Cruikshank published in The Fairy Library (1853-54). Here the Fairy Godmother objects to the serving of alcohol at

the wedding of Cinderella and the Prince because indulgence in alcohol is "always accompanied by ill-health, misery, and crime." The King is, of course, readily persuaded to abstinence, "and he immediately gave orders that all the wine, beer, and spirits in the place should be collected together and piled upon the top of a rocky mound in the vicinity of the palace, and made a great bonfire on the night of the wedding . . . and a splendid blaze it made."

From such a Fairy Godmother (and such a tour de force of sublimation), the modern reader may well recoil in impatience or disgust. That reader may also be excused for extending an eager welcome to those few works of an earlier day which do not rush, with such predictable and indecorous zeal, to instruct the young. Hence the relief with which scholars customarily hail Catherine Sinclair's Holiday House (1839), Felix Summerly's Home Treasury (1841-49), and, with most obvious relief, the works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. So R. L. Green praises"the absolute originality of sheer genius" in the Alice-books, and Derek Hudson speaks easily of "the revolution in children's literature implied by Alice in Wonderland." Anne Eaton calls Alice "the real beginning of modern literature for children," since "here . . . for the first time we find a story designed for children without a trace of a lesson or moral." The judicious F. J. H. Darton informs his reader that Alice in Wonderland is "the first unapologetic . . . appearance in print . . . of liberty of thought in children's books," and that it "was more than a flare of genius. It was the spiritual volcano of children's books."[3]

Certainly there is much in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to justify the enthusiasm of the critics. Confronted with a bottle bearing the legend "Drink Me," Alice very prudently hesitates, "for she had read several nice

little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them. . . ." Carroll's portrait of the Duchess as the didactic impulse incarnate ("Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it") likewise tells us that we are safely out of the hands of Cruikshank and his ilk--and this portrait is part of the larger pattern which continually questions the values and assumptions of Alice's world above ground. The undercutting of didacticism is merely one of the many elements in the book which contribute to its impression of "modernity."

But "modernity" is the most ephemeral of the literary virtues--and also one of the most vague. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is an astonishing work--but to call it a "spiritual volcano" shows more enthusiasm than accuracy. The ending of the novel at best banks its fires; Wonderland, instead of erupting, subsides into a child's dream. Furthermore, clarity of thought is hardly assisted by the prospect of Lewis Carroll looming majestically, like a sort of mid-Victorian Vesuvius, out of the mean and tangled shubbery of nineteenth-century children's literature. Carroll's essential originality is not the point at issue. There is, however, something to be learned (especially about the ending of Alice) by setting the novel in the context of the didactic tradition, and by considering it in relation to certain works by Carroll's contemporaries.

Critics have, of course, discussed Carroll in relation to Lear, and Kingsley, and to later writers of nonsense and fantasy. But no one seems much interested in juxtaposing Alice with a work published almost a quarter-century earlier: Browning's "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." Neither Darton nor Eaton, both vociferous in their praise of Carroll's originality, so

much as mentions Browning's poem, and a recent history of children's literature dismisses it with the observation that the "Pied Piper of Hamelin (1842) has survived many years of arduous service in the schoolroom and is still firmly established in print"[4]--almost as if the poet's enduring popularity with teachers were some sort of shameful secret which the true critic ought to ignore in the name of decency.

I do not wish to attempt the inviduous task of persuading lovers of Alice that Browning's poem is the superior work; I do wish to suggest that the similarities between Browning's poem and Carroll's novel merit investigation.

Both works were begun for the amusements of specific children (Carroll's for Alice Liddell, Browning's for William Macready, son of the celebrated tragedian); both employ a strange subterranean journey as a central device; and both are works of nonsense insofar as nonsense is "the art of rearranging immutable laws in such a way as to set logic, order, authority, or accepted standards of behavior slightly awry."[5] This last feature is the most significant. Both works attempt an imaginative revelation of child-adult relations, and both are critical of adults in general, and of those in authority in particular. Both violate the reigning didactic premise, and so [illegible] would have been considered altogether unsuitable for publication by such guardians of morality as The Juvenile Magazine.[6] Of the two works, Browning's is the more obviously critical--but neither is remarkable for the reverence with which it handles authority-figures. Finally, the narrators of both works provide their tales with a problematical ending, a comment on what has gone before that raises many interesting questions about the credibility of the narrator and the relationship of a story to the lesson which may be extracted from it.

Browning's poem apparently found its way into print somewhat haphazardly.

His publisher requested a few more pages to eke out the third number in Browning's Bells and Pomegranates a series of eight pamphlets which he published between 1841 and 1846, and so Browning sent him the version of the folk tale he had written for the son of his friend Macready. Though Browning himself may have thought less of it than of the "dramatic lyrics" which he was writing at the same time, "with this poem Browning piped knowledge of himself into the general heart, and the common comprehension of the reading public, which obstinately remained shut to the other treasures of 'Bells and Pomegranates.'"[7]

Despite Townsend's suggestion that "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" has been somehow kept alive by the slavish routine of classroom drudges, there are many good reasons for the survival of Browning's poem. Perhaps the most striking--in the context of nineteenth century children's literature--is the poem's treatment of the Mayor and the other members of the town Corporation. They are revealed as hypocrites of the worst sort--incompetent hypocrites. Simple gluttony tempts them into reneging on their offer to the Piper; when they offer to settle for fifty guilders, instead of the thousand guilders they provided, they provoke the Piper's anger. The mayor is indeed, as the exasperated townsfolk declare, "a noddy." Their lament that

> we buy gowns lined with ermine
> For dolts that can't or won't determine
> What's best to rid us of our vermin!

has a terse eloquence; the rhyming of "ermine" and "vermin" is as succinct a comment on the pretensions of authority as anything to be found in Alice. Browning's description of the Mayor's physical appearance

little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long opened oyster

does more than emphasise the morbidity of gluttony. Like the Corporation's reluctance to honour their promise ("half the money would replenish/Their cellar's biggest butt with Rehmish"), this description is especially telling in light of the fact that it is the undisguised gluttony of the rats which has provoked the crisis in Hamelin. What Browning's poem tells us is that all rats wear fur--and that the very cleverest ones wear gowns of ermine. The smug assurance of entrenched authority is further undermined by the poem's vindication of the Pied Piper despite the fact that he is "a wandering fellow/With a gipsy coat of red and yellow"--i.e., that he refuses to aspire to an ermine gown, and that he has no visible means of support. The sleek and immaculately garbed ineptitude of Mayor and Corporation must bow to this "lazy ribald/With idle pipe and vesture piebald." Dylan's Tambourine Man struts into the Oval Office.

In short, what is most immediately striking about Browning's poem is what does not happen in it: the forces of social order are not vindicated; bourgeois success is not confused with moral integrity; no lecture on the evils of intemperance is forthcoming, and Jehovah, Lord of Hosts, is not identified with Pater, City Hall, or the Lord Chief Justice. Less obvious, but equally worthy of attention, are the innovations Browning makes in his treatment of the story he inherits. His important sources seem to have been Nathaniel Wanley's Wonders of the Little World (1678), and Richard Verstegen's Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities (1605).[8] An examination of these sources reveals that Browning's most significant innovation is his invention of the one rat who survives the Piper's music. This seems a minor contribution to the story until we realize its significance in Browning's

poem. The rats, we are told

> fought the dogs and killed the cats,
> And bit the babies in the cradles,
> And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
> And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
> Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
> Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
> And even spoiled the women's chats
> By drowning their speaking
> With shrieking and squeaking
> In fifty different sharps and flats.

That is, they are guilty of eating as if they enjoyed it, of defying adult authority, of failing to respect adult conversation and adult costumes, of profaning the Sabbath (nests in Sunday hats), and of expressing sibling rivalry. (What right-minded child has not wanted at one time or another, to bite the newest inhabitant of the family cradle?). The similarity of rats and children is underscored by the structural parallel; the rat who survives is the double of the little lame boy who is denied entry to the Piper's "joyous land." The cumulative effect is the imaginative suggestion that children and rats are equally offensive to those in authority--a suggestion violently at odds with the professed belief of most authors of children's literature in Browning's day.

Yet Browning's audacious revelation of the nature of the relationship between adults and children is not the most remarkable feature of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." That distinction is reserved for the variation on the conventional didactic impulse with which Browning closes his poem. On the surface, the last lines of the poem appear innocuous enough:

> So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
> Of scores out with all men--especially pipers!
> And, whether they pipe us free from rats or from mice,
> If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

But its apparent conventionality, its bland resemblance to a thousand other concluding morals, is as deceptive as the Piper's apparent insignificance. If we can suppress the impulse to dismiss the poem's "moral" as a trite and gratuitous appendage, and consider it instead as an integral part of the poem's dramatic utterance, we can see what Browning is doing.

The inadequacy of the appended "moral" is obvious enough. Whatever Browning's poem is about, it is not about the bourgeois punctiliousness which is all his narrator extracts from the story of the Pied Piper. The narrator's moral serenely ignores the most striking features of the poem: the comic exposure of the folly of (adult) authority and bourgeois mentality, and the fact that the Pied Piper is Orpheus redux. The one sad survivor of the children's exodus laments his exile from that earthly paradise which the Piper promises the children:

> He led us, he said, to a joyous land,
> Joining the town and just at hand,
> Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
> And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
> And everything was bright and new;
> The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
> And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
> And honey-bees had lost their stings,
> And horses were born with eagles' wings:
> And just as I became assured
> My lame foot would be speedily cured,
> The music stopped and I stood still,
> And found myself outside the hill,
> Left alone against my will,
> To go now limping as before,
> And never hear of that country more!

Does the Piper keep his promise? The children never return to Hamelin--and this may be paradise enough in the world of the poem. We are, however, also told

That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land
But how or why, they don't understand.[9]

That is, the Pied Piper has led the children down into the earth, and out again; and yet this symbolic death and resurrection utterly escapes the notice of Browning's moralizing narrator. Perhaps Browning's poem has nothing to teach, but most good teaching has a strong element of the subversive to it, and Browning's poem is profoundly and wholesomely subversive of the notion that the Chamber of Commerce keeps the keys to Paradise--or to anything else worth the having. The children of the burghers of Hamelin end, not as good, godly citizens, prosperous in this world and the next, but as gypsies--a reversal of conventional rewards calculated to give a Victorian paterfamilias apoplexy. We also note that, once the children enter the mountain, all the Corporation's horses and all the Corporation's men cannot fetch them back. Browning's poem tells us that, if we are ever to emerge from our "subterraneous prison," we must look to our poets for leaders.

In her exploration of the subversive element in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, F. B. Lennon observes of Lewis Carroll: "Under the guise of nonsense he shows the ephemerality and unimportance of our most cherished categories"[10] Browning's poem is no less deftly revealing. To see why this is so requires an appreciation of Browning's play with the appended "moral," an appreciation best achieved by a brief survey of the didactic tradition in children's literature.

If didacticism be the curse under which children's literature has long laboured, it is ironic indeed that the amiable and urbane poet Horace should have been the person to pronounce it. Two lines in his "Ars poetica"

> Poets wish either to teach or to delight,
> Or to utter that which is at once
> Both useful and pleasing.[11]

dominated formal thinking about literature for children until the nineteenth century. The "Ars poetica" was the most influential work of criticism known to western Europe in the Middle Ages--but its influence on writing for children persisted long after Renaissance humanism altered and enriched both the theory and practice of letters. The courtesy-books, almost the first kind of writing intended specifically for children, of course taught lessons which would be useful to them in social life. Typical is the tale of "How a Knight's Daughter Lost Her Marriage by Her Vanity" in the fourteenth-century Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry. Compiled for the Instruction of his Daughters, and published by Caxton in 1483. The tale concluded with the inevitable "Now have ye herd good Ensample" pointing the moral which the child was to draw from the tale. Similarly, each tale in the Gesta Romanorum (compiled 1250?; first published c. 1472) has an appended "moralite"; their lessons are religious rather than social, but the didactic intent is evident. The didacticism of the Puritan writers needs no bush, and the power of the Horatian model is more surprisingly attested by its presence in works which scarcely lend themselves to teaching of any sort. In the chap-books, for example, even a "pure" romance like the "History of Valentine and Orson" is prefaced with an assurance to the reader that "'Twill both Instruct thee and Delight thee too." Even though the moral drawn is only that "none withstand . . . The mighty force of Death's all-conquering hand," the Horatian

principle has been upheld in form, if not in spirit. Newberry's preface to the "Pretty Little Pocket Book" (1744) describes it as "intended for the instruction and amusement of children"; Locke praises Aesop's Fables ("the only book almost that I know fit for children") because "being stories apt to delight and entertain a child [they] may yet afford useful reflections to a grown man." The Juvenile Magazine describes itself as "an instructive, entertaining miscellany for youth of both sexes," and encouraged its young readers to write the Editor "should you . . . at any time perceive an unruly passion or habit intruding, or a situation in which you are at a loss to conduct yourselves" in order that they might be "furnished in the next Magazine, with that advice which may enable you to overcome the one, and accomodate yourselves to the other." Finally, the writings of the Little Female Academy and their spiritual heirs show that the Horatian model proved far more durable than any particular set of notions or morals which it might serve to enshrine. Didacticism as a principle is independent of content. The idea that literature should teach and delight is not merely a convenient way of describing a writer's intentions; it is also a way of thinking about literary form. Whatever the content of a piece of writing for children, the need to blend instruction and delight largely determines the writer's sense of which elements of his work are of real importance and which are of only minor significance.

I do not wish to encourage any cheap cynicism about the Horatian formula. It is difficult--and probably dishonest--to fault the didactic principle as a principle. After all, if we do not learn something from our reading--why should we bother with books at all? It is much easier to fault the practice of didacticism. Horace voiced the principle, but it was the attitude of the Church Fathers (and of Augustine in particular) which determined the

characteristic bias with which it was applied. "The curse of the Roman" on children's literature is not didacticism per se, but the insistence that what literature has to teach (which is almost always thought to be reducible to a sententia of ten words or less) is of much greater importance than the story which is the vehicle of that teaching. "It is a mark of good and distinguished minds," Augustine says in his De doctrina, "to love the truth within words and not the words themselves" (IV, xi, 26): his view of literature is summed up in his oft-quoted statement that letter is to sententia as husk is to kernel. The neglect of literary and aesthetic values in favour of teaching useful lessons is all too evident in literature written for children from the fifteenth century until our own day. The Gesta Romanorum, for example, relates the story of Theodosius "a wys emperour in the City of Rome" who divided his kingdom among his three daughters. The appended "moralite" informs the reader that "the first daughter . . . is the world," that "the seconde daughter . . . is thi wife or thi children," and the third daughter, (who is of course the only one to love Theodosius truly) "is our lord god, whom we lovith to litel." There is no necessity in the fiction for such an interpretation--and it requires an effort of will for the reader to recognize in this tidy little allegory the kernel of Shakespeare's King Lear.

The same disregard of literary possibilities, this single-minded concentration on teaching a useful lesson, is most clearly and comically seen in the writings of the Puritans. When the New England Primer tells us that

> Xerxes the great did die,
> And so must you & I

we are left in little doubt that we are not to be much interested in Xerxes

or the story of his greatness. Consider also Bunyan's "Upon the Weather-cock," from A Book for Boys and Girls (1686, later re-titled Divine Emblems):

> Brave weathercock, I see thou'lt set thy nose
> Against the wind, which way soe'er it blows:
> So let a Christian in any wise
> Face Antichrist in each disguise.

The choice of emblem is both inappropriate and unflattering; comparing the Christian to a mechanical bird swinging with every wind scarcely does justice to the Christian struggle against evil. But, though the fiction is more deplorable than delightful, the moral is, of course, beyond reproach. A sense of humour does not seem to have had a prominent place among Bunyan's many gifts; his interest, like that of Augustine, is in the truth in words, rather than in the words themselves. His work reveals, with wonderful clarity, the characteristic bias with which the didactic principle was applied. Not only should literature teach and delight; it should also demonstrate an unvarying relationship between fiction and meaning; the fiction or emblem may be somewhat arbitrary--but the moral to be drawn from it is authoritative, definitive, and final. The envoi to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress cautions the reader against any unwholesome childish interest in the fictive elements of the book:

> Take heed . . . that thou be not extreme,
> In playing with the outside of my dream:
> Nor let my figure or similitude
> Put thee into a laughter or a feud;
> Leave this for boys and fools; but as for thee,
> Do thou the substance of my matter see.

We are fortunate indeed that boys, fools, and Robert Browning scorn Bunyan's faith in the authoritative moralizing mission of literature. Bunyan, as one of the most candid spokesmen of the didactic tradition,

helps us understand what Browning is up to at the end of "The Pied Piper." Browning honours the Horatian formula to the letter by drawing a moral at the end of his poem--but he utterly and delightfully subverts the traditional authority, and importance of such moralizing. The point is not simply that the moral drawn by his narrator is "hardly credible"[12] as the serious cargo of his fiction--one could say the same of Perrault's morals, for example. (But Perrault's morals do not make the narrator ridiculous.) Nor is the point that Browning eschews the didactic possibilities of the story (though he plays an interesting variation on the theme suggested by Burton's account of the Pied Piper: "At Hamel, in Saxony, on the twentieth of July, 1484, the Devil, in the likeness of a pied piper, carried away 130 children, that were never after seen."[13]) What is striking is the way in which Browning's "moral" subverts the basic premise of the entire didactic tradition. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" is however playfully a poem about spiritual life and spiritual death, and about the values by which men live. When the poem's narrator shrivels these values and these concerns to a tidy homily on the virtue of keeping promises, we cannot help but feel that he has somehow missed the point. This dramatic revelation of the limitations of the moralizing mentality is an integral part of the poem--for it calls into strict question, as surely as does the tale itself, the limitations of those who set themselves up as the mentors of the young. Since the moralizing narrator is so obviously an unreliable guide to the meaning of the story he tells, Browning's poem strikes at the heart of the didactic premise. The inadequate comment of his narrator sets up tensions and ambiguities reminiscent of many of Browning's other poems of the same period--poems such as "Porphyria's Lover," "My Last Duchess," and "The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister." There is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in The Boy Scout Handbook,

and Browning's adroit and ironic handling of the didactic approach underscores the obvious inadequacy of the perpetrators of so much instructive--and--amusing literature for children.

The use Browning makes of the time-honoured Horatian formula likewise gives us a perspective on the ending of Darton's "spiritual volcano," Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Like Browning, Carroll ends his fiction with a comment apparently intended to direct the reader's understanding. But how well do the final comments of Carroll's narrator--comments not overtly moral, but nonetheless significant in shaping the reader's response--do justice to the story they conclude? When we follow Alice's adventures to their climax at the trial of the Knave of Hearts, we follow the perils and difficulties of a child thrown into a irrational society and trying to accomodate herself to that society and find a place in it. Alice is "very much pleased at having found out a new kind of rule" because she hopes a full knowledge of the rules and conventions of Wonderland will help her answer "the great puzzle": "'Who in the world am I?'" Her struggle to accomodate herself is often pointedly reminiscent of the common struggles of children in the "normal" world above ground. Both in that world and Wonderland, children are treated as if they have "'just about as much right [to think]' . . . 'as pigs have to fly.'" The King of Hearts might be any father soothing any exasperated spouse when he dismisses Alice with the words: "'Consider, my dear, she is only a child.'" Carroll's account, however "nonsensical," is a valid parable of the child's struggle with the forces of authority and social convention. This struggle reaches its crisis in the courtroom, where Alice, like any well-brought-up child, is at first eager to fit in ("Alice had never been in a court of justice before, but she had read about them in books, and she was quite pleased to find that she knew the name of nearly

everything there.") But the trial, like the caucus-race, the living croquet game, and the Lobster Quadrille, proves less than satisfactory as a way of ordering chaos. The difference this time is that Alice refuses to join in the dance. She has learned the folly of argument and reasonable persuasion as ways of dealing with the inhabitants of Wonderland. When she refuses to accept the conventions of justice in Wonderland ("'sentence first--verdict afterwards'"), no choice is left her but the defiance of authority. So Alice denounces the arbitrary authority and conventions of Wonderland as "nothing but a pack of cards," and with a "scream half of fright and half of anger," stands her ground against the pack. It is at this moment that she wakes up.

What does Carroll's narrator make of this richly unconventional account of a child's defiance of the forces of law and order? Alice shares her dream with her sister, and then runs off to her tea, "thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been." The "dream" is further devalued when Alice's sister falls asleep and "the whole place around her became alive with the strange creatures" of Alice's adventures; but though "she sat on with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, . . . she knew she had but to open them again and all would change to dull reality." The novel closes with her vision of Alice as a woman grown, "the simple and loving heart of her childhood" miraculously intact, and of how Alice will one day "gather about her other little children, and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago. . . ."

In all of western literature, what other dream vision of even remotely comparable quality repudiates itself so thoroughly as this? Alice is made of stern stuff; we would not wish her to wallow in the <u>angst</u> of the left-bank

literati. But we have seen her, half in fear and half in anger, defy the assembled forces of social order and in the very courtroom which is the visible embodiment of that order. We may well be disappointed at seeing this promising young rebel reduced to Mother Goose. The contrast with Browning's poem is illuminating. The Pied Piper changed the lives of the people of Hamelin; his story is depicted on a memorial column, and "on the great church window painted"; and--oh sweet revenge--all legal documents in Hamelin must bear the date of his abduction of the children. Like Browning's children, Carroll's Alice goes down into a hole in the ground, and comes back out again--and the narrator asks us to believe that nothing whatever has changed. It is this request that has led some critics to stigmatize Alice's return as a "flight," a "desperate leap back to the above-ground certainties of social formalities and ordinary logic."[14] But it is Carroll's narrator, and not his heroine, who is guilty of such a flight--and of relegating the alarming implications of Alice's adventures to the baseless fabric of a dream. Nonetheless, for many a reader, the implications of the novel, rather than its formal reassurances that all this is merely "a wonderful dream," are what stick in the mind. We understand Carroll's fiction despite the narrator's concluding remarks--not because of them.

Speaking of the Alice-books, Carroll was prepared to "guarantee that the books have no religious teaching whatever in them--in fact they do not teach anything at all."[15] Still, as Carroll himself admitted, "words mean more than we mean to express when we use them; so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer means."[16] What Alice's Adventures in Wonderland means--or doesn't mean--is not to be determined by the narrator's concluding remarks, but by what the reader can deduce from the entire pattern of Carroll's novel. Michael Holquist has observed that, "in the game of

nonsense . . . . The system itself provides the assurance that only it can give meaning to itself."[17] This assurance, for both "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, is highlighted by the obvious inadequacy of the narrator's comments on the tale he relates. In both works, we are encouraged to look beyond the formal comments to the fiction itself--just as the Ancient Mariner's hearty praise of the marvellous providence which killed two hundred of his shipmates (his own nephew among them) in order to teach him to Be Kind to Birds sends us back to his story to extract our own meaning from the tale.

For the modern reader, a large part of the "meaning" of Alice is bound up with the tension between the narrator's suggestion that it was all a dream, and the story's insistence that it is a highly significant dream. This tension is very like the dramatic and ironic trnsion in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" which arises when we confront the difference between what the speaker takes his tale to "mean" and the meaning we draw from it. Both works challenge the smug didacticism of so much of the literature written for children, and both undercut the assurance of those omniscient moralizers who presume to illuminate for us the meaning of our own experience. Finally, both show us a way out of the "subterraneous prison" in which we and all our certainties lie. Browning's Piper becomes a sort of lay saint, his story "on the great church-window painted." So did that other auctorial persona, Lewis Carroll; I am told that, in the church of the village of Daresbury, in Chesire, where Lewis Carroll's father was once the parson, there is a window "In Memory of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), author of Alice in Wonderland"[18] If no such window exists, it certainly ought ot; for both Lewis Carroll and Robert Browning dared to dream mighty dreams. Such Dreamers are more often admired than welcomed--but it is not the business

of literature to make us either useful or comfortable. In the twin cases of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, we do well to remember these words from the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh: The dream was marvellous, but the terror was great; we must treasure the dream, whatever the terror."

## Notes

[1] In her introduction to Holiday House, Catherine Sinclair declares her intention "to preserve a sort of fabulous remembrance of days long past, when young people were like wild horses on the prairies, rather than like well-broken hacks on the road; and when, amid many faults and many eccentricities, there was still some individuality of character and feeling allowed to remain." In theory, to teach the virtue of "some individuality of character and feeling" is no less a didactic purpose than to teach that crime does not pay. In practice, Holiday House is scarcely free of the primness and didactic intent its author affects to deplore.

[2] F. J. H. Darton, Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life, second ed. (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 96-97.

[3] R. L. Green, "Alice," in Aspects of Alice, ed. Robert Phillips (New York: Vanguard, 1971), p. 28; Derek Hudson, Lewis Carroll (London: Longmans, 1958), p. 20; Anne Eaton in A Critical History of Children's Literature, ed. C. Meigs (New York: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 210-11; R. J. H. Darton, op. cit., pp. 268, 267.

[4] John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children, rev. ed. (Penguin, 1976). p. 137.

[5] Anthology of Children's Literature, fourth ed., ed. E. Johnson, E. R. Sickels, and F. C. Sayers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 44.

[6] Founded in 1788, The Juvenile Magazine was the first British periodical for children. It was devoted to providing "little tracts for the Instruction and Entertainment of Young Minds," and the editor assured readers of the first issue that, "since it is chiefly intended for young people, from SEVEN to FOURTEEN years of age . . . tales of Gallantry, Love, Courtship or Marriage cannot be admitted; not any in which the conduct or foibles of a PARENT are treated disrespectfully, or set in a ridiculous point of view."

[7] Frances M. Sim, Robert Browning: The Poet and the Man (London: Fisher Unwin, 1923), p. 142. We know that Carroll's library contained works by Browning; it is highly unlikely that someone so interested in children as Carroll was would not have known this poem.

[8] See Arthur Dickson, "Browning's Source for The Pied Piper of Hamelin," Studies in Philology, XXIII, no. 3 (July, 1926), 327-36.

[9] That Browning's "nonsense" is essential to the meaning of his poem is seen when we compare his account with that of Verstegen. Of the many improbable details of the story, Verstegen refutes only the resurrection of

the children because "to have had so many strange children brought among them" would have been so startling to the Transylvanians that "they could not but have kept memorie of so strange a thing: if indeed any such thing had there hapned" (p. 130).

[10] Florence Becker Lennon, The Life of Lewis Carroll, rev. ed. (New York, 1962), p. 214. On the "modern" element in Carroll, see also the essays by P. M. Spacks and Donald Rackin in Aspects of Alice.

[11] Aut prodense volunt aut delectare poetae,
Aut simul et incunda et idonea dicere vitae (333-34)

[12] W. C. de Vane, A Browning Handbook, rev. ed. (New York, 1955), p. 131.

[13] The Anatomy of Melancholy, (1651), I, ii, 1, ii.

[14] Donald Rackin in Aspects of Alice, p. 392.

[15] From a letter quoted in Roger Lancelyn Green, Lewis Carroll (New York, 1962), p. 52.

[16] Quoted in Hudson, p. 32. Carroll was speaking of The Hunting of the Snark; he concludes this succinct anticipation of the theory of the intentional fallacy with a characteric caveat: "So, whatever good meanings are in the book, I'm glad to accept as the meaning of the book."

[17] Michael Holquist, "What is a Boojum? Nonsense and Modernism," as reprinted in Lewis Carroll: Alice in Wonderland, ed. D. J. Gray (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 413.

[18] Roger Lancelyn Green, Tellers of Tales, rev. ed. (Leicester: Ward, 1953), p. 32.